Paperpal

Designing an AI writing tool that academics actually want to use—by understanding that generic tools built for everyone work for no one in research.

ROLE	COMPANY	TIMELINE	TEAM
UX Research & Design	**Cactus Communications**	**2023–2024**	**5 people**

01. THE PROBLEM

Generic AI Tools Aren't Built for Academic Rigor

Researchers have unique workflows that generic writing tools like Grammarly completely miss. They don't just need grammar checking—they need citation management, manuscript formatting, academic tone consistency, and journal-specific guidance. When researchers tried to adapt general-purpose tools to their specialized needs, they hit walls.

The Research Reality

We spoke with students, PhD researchers, senior academics, medical professionals, and lab coordinators. Despite their different career stages, they all shared a common frustration:

→ Fragmented workflows across 5+ tools for research, writing, and citation

→ No AI assistance tailored to academic tone and manuscript structure

→ Confusion about when and how to use new AI features

→ Skepticism about trusting AI with scholarly work

USER SEGMENTS WE RESEARCHED

Students
PhD, Masters, Bachelors

Early-Career Researchers
Post-Docs, Assistant Professors

Senior Academics
Tenured Professors, PIs, Deans

Lab Support
Managers, Secretaries, Librarians

Medical Professionals
Researchers & Practitioners

02. THE RESEARCH

Why Mixed Methods Revealed What Surveys Alone Couldn't

The key insight: **A survey would tell us what researchers do. Only interviews could tell us why they're frustrated.**

167 pieces of feedback across quantitative + qualitative research

📊 Survey Sparrow (Quantitative)

We created a survey to understand the what. Demographics, current tools, pain points, satisfaction levels—all the baseline data we needed to target interviews intelligently.

- ✓ Identified trends across demographics
- ✓ Mapped tool usage patterns
- ✓ Filtered participants for deeper interviews

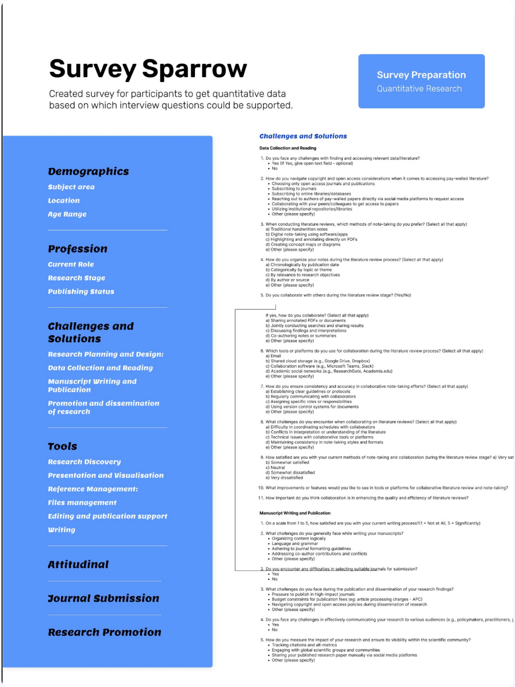
🎤 Dovetail Interviews (Qualitative)

We interviewed researchers one-on-one using Dovetail, capturing the emotional context, hesitations, and unspoken worries that surveys miss. The tagging system let us group similar concerns across 30+ interviews.

- ✓ Revealed emotional barriers to AI trust
- ✓ Captured feature discovery problems
- ✓ Uncovered hidden use cases

Together, they created a complete picture:

Survey data told us researchers weren't using Paperpal's AI features. Interview data showed us why: they didn't know the features existed, or didn't trust AI to help with academic work. This gap between availability and discoverability became our north star.



Survey Sparrow

Created survey for participants to get quantitative data based on which interview questions could be supported.

Survey Preparation
Quantitative Research

Demographics
- Subject area
- Location
- Age Range

Profession
- Current Role
- Research Stage
- Publishing Status

Challenges and Solutions
- Research Planning and Design:
- Data Collection and Reading
- Manuscript Writing and Publication
- Promotion and dissemination of research

Tools
- Research Discovery
- Presentation and Visualisation
- Reference Management:
- Files management
- Editing and publication support
- Writing

Attitudinal

Journal Submission

Research Promotion

Challenges and Solutions

Data Collection and Reading

1. Do you face any challenges with finding and accessing relevant data/literature?
   - Yes (If Yes, give open text field - optional)
   - No
2. How do you navigate copyright and open access considerations when it comes to accessing pay-walled literature?
   - Choosing only open access journals and publications
   - Subscribing to journals
   - Subscribing to online libraries/databases
   - Reaching out to authors of pay-walled papers directly via social media platforms to request access
   - Collaborating with your peers/colleagues to get access to papers
   - Utilizing institutional repositories/libraries
   - Other (please specify)
3. When conducting literature reviews, which methods of note-taking do you prefer? (Select all that apply)
   a) Traditional handwritten notes
   b) Digital note-taking using software/apps
   c) Highlighting and annotating directly on PDFs
   d) Creating concept maps or diagrams
   e) Other (please specify)
4. How do you organize your notes during the literature review process? (Select all that apply)
   a) Chronologically by publication date
   b) Categorically by topic or theme
   c) By relevance to research objectives
   d) By author or source
   e) Other (please specify)
5. Do you collaborate with others during the literature review stage? (Yes/No)

   If yes, how do you collaborate? (Select all that apply)
   a) Sharing annotated PDFs or documents
   b) Jointly conducting searches and sharing results
   c) Discussing findings and interpretations
   d) Co-authoring notes or summaries
   e) Other (please specify)
6. Which tools or platforms do you use for collaboration during the literature review process? (Select all that apply)
   a) Email
   b) Shared cloud storage (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox)
   c) Collaboration software (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack)
   d) Academic social networks (e.g., ResearchGate, Academia.edu)
   e) Other (please specify)
7. How do you ensure consistency and accuracy in collaborative note-taking efforts? (Select all that apply)
   a) Establishing clear guidelines or protocols
   b) Regularly communicating with collaborators
   c) Assigning specific roles or responsibilities
   d) Using version control systems for documents
   e) Other (please specify)
8. What challenges do you encounter when collaborating on literature reviews? (Select all that apply)
   a) Difficulty in coordinating schedules with collaborators
   b) Conflicts in interpretation or understanding of the literature
   c) Technical issues with collaborative tools or platforms
   d) Maintaining consistency in note-taking styles and formats
   e) Other (please specify)
9. How satisfied are you with your current methods of note-taking and collaboration during the literature review stage? a) Very sat
   b) Somewhat satisfied
   c) Neutral
   d) Somewhat dissatisfied
   e) Very dissatisfied
10. What improvements or features would you like to see in tools or platforms for collaborative literature review and note-taking?
11. How important do you think collaboration is in enhancing the quality and efficiency of literature reviews?

Manuscript Writing and Publication

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your current writing process?(1 = Not at All, 5 = Significantly)
2. What challenges do you generally face while writing your manuscripts?
   - Organizing content logically
   - Language and grammar
   - Adhering to journal formatting guidelines
   - Addressing co-author contributions and conflicts
   - Other (please specify)
2. Do you encounter any difficulties in selecting suitable journals for submission?
   - Yes
   - No
3. What challenges do you face during the publication and dissemination of your research findings?
   - Pressure to publish in high-impact journals
   - Budget constraints for publication fees (eg: article processing charges - APC)
   - Navigating copyright and open access policies during dissemination of research
   - Other (please specify)
4. Do you face any challenges in effectively communicating your research to various audiences (e.g., policymakers, practitioners,
   - Yes
   - No
5. How do you measure the impact of your research and ensure its visibility within the scientific community?
   - Tracking citations and alt-metrics
   - Engaging with global scientific groups and communities
   - Sharing your published research paper manually via social media platforms
   - Other (please specify)

03. THE FINDINGS

What Researchers Actually Told Us

After analyzing 167 tagged feedback items from interviews and surveys, we identified five critical themes.

📌 Trust Barrier

Researchers were skeptical about AI changing their work without their understanding. They wanted transparency and control—not black-box suggestions.

🔍 Feature Invisibility

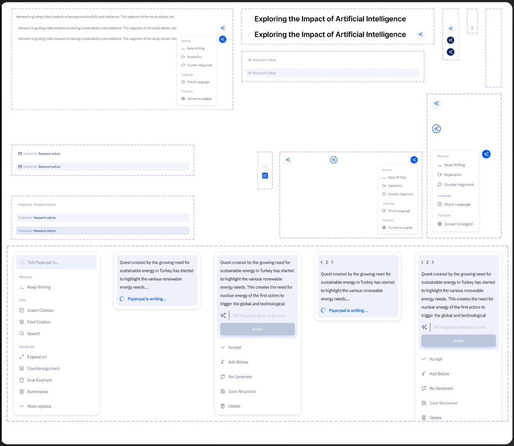
Powerful AI features existed but were hidden. Researchers didn't even know what Paperpal could do for them.

🎯 Context Matters

Generic writing help was useless. Researchers needed features that spoke their language: academic tone, journal compliance, citation accuracy.

⚙️ Workflow Friction

Researchers used Paperpal alongside Word, Microsoft Teams, and multiple databases. Seamless integration was non-negotiable.


Exploring the Impact of Artificial Intelligence
Brainstorm Ideas
Outline for Research article
Rewrite
Keep Writing
Expand on
Counter Argument
Language
Check Language
Translate
Convert to english
Tell Paperpal to...
Cite
Insert Citation
Find Citation
Search
Generate
Counterargument
Give Example
Summarise
More options
Paperpal is writing...
Tell Paperpal what to do next
Enter
Accept
Add Below
Re-Generate
Save Response
Delete

element in guiding cities towards achieving sustainability and resilience. This segment of the study delves into

Quest created by the growing need for sustainable energy in Turkey has started to highlight the various renewable energy needs. This creates the need for nuclear energy of the first actors to trigger the global and technological

AI Writing Tool

Requirement analysis and competitor analysis followed by ideation and internal stakeholder approvals.

Ideation
Final Component Creation

Blank document

Templates
Outlines
- Research Article
- Essay
- Case Report
- SOP

General Email
Email the journal
Brainstorm ideas for...

Have some Text

Continue Writing
- Auto Predict
- Custom instruction (Text bar)
- Add Analogy
- Add Counter Argument
- Add Conclusion

Highlighted sentence or paragraph

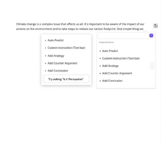
Rewrite
- Paraphrase
- Make Academic
- Trim
- Check Language
- Translate

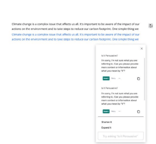
Highlight word

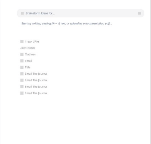
Find Synonyms
Translate

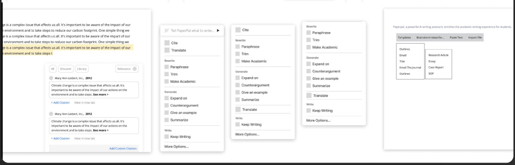
Have some text - Full Paper/ Essay

Continue Writing
Something
- Summary
- Title Abstract
- Study Highlights
- Keywords
- Journal
- More...


Climate change is a complex issue that affects us all. It's important to be aware of the impact of our actions on the environment and to take steps to reduce our carbon footprint. One simple thing we
Auto Predict
Custom instruction (Text bar)
Add Analogy
Add Counter Argument
Add Conclusion
Try asking "Is it Persuasive"


Climate change is a complex issue that affects us all. It's important to be aware of the impact of our actions on the environment and to take steps to reduce our carbon footprint. One simple thing we
Is it Persuasive?
Shorten it
Expand it
Try asking "Is it Persuasive"


Brainstorm ideas for...
Import File
Outlines
Email
Title
Email The Journal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Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., **2012**

Climate change is a complex issue that affects us all. It's important to be aware of the impact of our actions on the environment and to take steps. **See more >**

Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., **2012**

Climate change is a complex issue that affects us all. It's important to be aware of the impact of our actions on the environment and to take steps. **See more >**

Paperpal, a powerful AI writing assistant, enriches the academic writing experience for students.

All
Discover
Library
Relevance
+ Add Citation
View in new tab
+ Add Citation
View in new tab
Add Custom Citation
Tell PaperPal what to write...
Cite
Translate
Rewrite
Paraphrase
Trim
Make Academic
Generate
Expand on
Counterargument
Give an example
Summarize
Write
Keep Writing
More Options...
Cite
Rewrite
Paraphrase
Trim
Make Academic
Generate
Expand on
Counterargument
Give an example
Summarize
Translate
Write
Keep Writing
More Options...
Rewrite
Paraphrase
Trim
Make Academic
Generate
Expand on
Counterargument
Give an example
Summarize
Translate
Write
Keep Writing
More Options...
Templates
Brainstorm Ideas for...
Paste Text
Import File
Outlines
Email
Title
Email The Journal
Outlines
Research Article
Essay
Case Report
SOP

The Aha Moment

Building for the right people isn't enough. If they can't find what you built, adoption dies. A feature isn't powerful until it's discoverable.

Discoverability Shapes Adoption

During usability testing, we discovered that our Copilot button—designed to trigger AI assistance—was invisible to 40% of users. They scrolled past it. They didn't recognize its purpose. The feature was brilliant. The discovery was broken.

The Testing Reality

40%+ missed the Copilot button entirely. It wasn't a feature problem; it was a visibility problem. Researchers had the tool but couldn't find it.

Word Add-in conflicts caused friction. Integration issues meant features didn't always work as expected, eroding trust.

This finding rewired our entire design strategy. We didn't need smarter features. We needed smarter discoverability.

04. THE DESIGN

Making Academic AI Discoverable

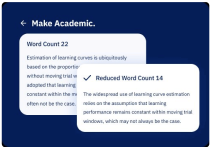
We redesigned Paperpal around visibility and trust. Every feature needed a clear path to discovery. Every action needed context.

The AI Inline Toolbar

Instead of hiding AI features in menus, we surfaced them at the

Academic Writing Features

Inline controls for Paraphrase, Plagiarism, Make Academic, and more


Make Academic.

Word Count 22

Estimation of learning curves is ubiquitously based on the proportio
without moving trial w
adopted that learning
constant within the m
often not be the case.

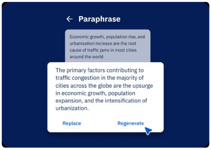
✓ Reduced Word Count 14

The widespread use of learning curve estimation relies on the assumption that learning performance remains constant within moving trial windows, which may not always be the case.

moment of need—inline, contextual, and hard to miss.

- ✓ Rewrite: Transform sentences while preserving meaning
- ✓ Make Academic: Shift tone to scholarly standard
- ✓ Cite: Insert proper citations with context
- ✓ Paraphrase: Rephrase content with academic synonyms
- ✓ Trim: Reduce word count without sacrificing clarity

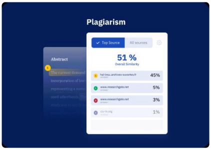
✓ Each feature answered "What does this do?" and "Why do I need it?"


Paraphrase

Economic growth, population rise, and urbanisation increase are the root cause of traffic jams in most cities around the world

The primary factors contributing to traffic congestion in the majority of cities across the globe are the upsurge in economic growth, population expansion, and the intensification of urbanization.

Replace
Regenerate

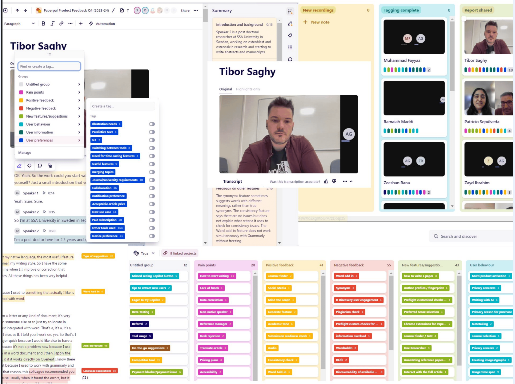

Plagiarism

Abstract
Top Source
All sources
51 %
Overall Similarity
hal-inria.archives-ouvertes.fr 45%
www.researchgate.net 5%
www.researchgate.net 3%
cyu-in.org 1%

Dovetail

Categorized user interview transcripts by tagging and summarized them for internal stakeholders and team.

Transcript Analysis
Tagging and Summarizing


Paperpal Product Feedback Q4 (2023-24)
Share
Paragraph
Automation
Tibor Saghy
Find or create a tag...
Groups
Untitled group
Pain points
Positive feedback
Negative feedback
New features/suggestions
User behaviour
User information
User preferences
Manage
Create a tag...
Tags
Illustration needs 1
Predictive text 3
UX 7
switching between tools 8
Need for time-saving features 3
Useful features 9
merging topics
Journal/university requirements 10
Collaboration 16
notification preference
Acceptable article price
New use case 11
Paid subscription 20
Other tools used 164
Device preference 21
Summary
New recordings 0
New note
Tagging complete 8
Report shared
Muhammad Fayyaz
Tibor Saghy
Ramaiah Maddi
Patricio Sepúlveda
Zeeshan Rana
Zayd Ibrahim
Original
Highlights only
Transcript
Was this transcription accurate?
Search and discover
Tags
9 linked projects
Untitled group 12
Pain points 28
Positive feedback 41
Negative feedback 55
New features/suggestio... 43
User behaviour
Missed seeing Copilot button 5
tips to attract new users 2
How to start writing 11
Lack of funds 1
Journal finder 2
Social Media 1
Word add in 1
Synonyms 1
how to write a paper 8
Author profiles / fingerprint 1
Multi product activation 1
Privacy concerns 1

OK. Yeah. So the work could you start wit yourself? Just a small introduction that yo

Speaker 1 0:14

Yeah. Sure. Sure.

Speaker 2 0:15

So I'm at SSA University in Sweden in Tec

Speaker 2 0:20

I'm a post doctor here for 2.5 years and

Introduction and background 0:15

Speaker 2 is a post doctoral researcher at SSA University in Sweden, working on osteoblast and osteocalcin research and starting to write abstracts and manuscripts.

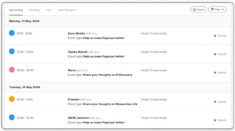
Feedback on other features 5:16

The synonyms feature sometimes suggests words with different meanings rather than true synonyms. The consistency feature says there are no issues but does not explain what criteria it uses to check for consistency issues. The Word add-in feature does not work simultaneously with Grammarly without freezing.

Calendly

Scheduled interview meetings and sent emails for incentives and follow ups to participants.

Interview Scheduling
Follow up with participants


Upcoming
Pending
Past
Date Range
Export
Filter

Monday, 13 May 2024

11:00 - 11:30 **Dave Mobile** with you — Event type **Help us make Paperpal better!** — 1 host | 0 non-hosts — Details

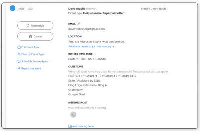
12:30 - 13:00 **Opoku Adusei** with you — Event type **Help us make Paperpal better!** — 1 host | 0 non-hosts — Details

18:00 - 18:30 **Maria** with you — Event type **Share your thoughts on R Discovery** — 1 host | 0 non-hosts — Details

Tuesday, 14 May 2024

10:30 - 11:00 **Praveen** with you — Event type **Share your thoughts on Researcher.Life** — 1 host | 0 non-hosts — Details

15:00 - 15:30 **IZERE Salomon** with you — Event type **Help us make Paperpal better!** — 1 host | 0 non-hosts — Details


Reschedule
Cancel
Edit Event Type
Filter by Event Type
Schedule Invitee Again
Report this event
Add meeting notes

11:00 - 11:30 **Dave Mobile** with you — 1 host | 0 non-hosts
Event type **Help us make Paperpal better!**

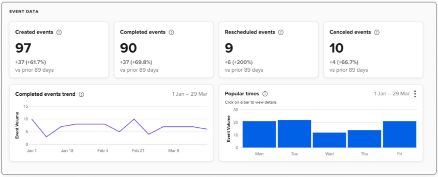
EMAIL
davemobile.org@gmail.com

LOCATION
This is a Microsoft Teams web conference.
Additional details to join this meeting >

INVITEE TIME ZONE
Eastern Time - US & Canada

QUESTIONS
Which AI tools have you used for your research? Please select all that apply.
ChatGPT / ChatGPT 3.5 / ChatGPT4 / ChatGPT Plus
Scite / Assistant by Scite
Bing Edge extension / Bing AI
Grammarly
Google Bard

MEETING HOST
Host will attend this meeting


Event Volume
15
10
5
0
Jan 1
Jan 18
Feb 4
Feb 21
Mar 9
Event Volume
30
20
10
0
Mon
Tue
Wed
Thu
Fri

EVENT DATA

Created events 97 — +37 (+61.7%) vs prior 89 days

Completed events 90 — +37 (+69.8%) vs prior 89 days

Rescheduled events 9 — +6 (+200%) vs prior 89 days

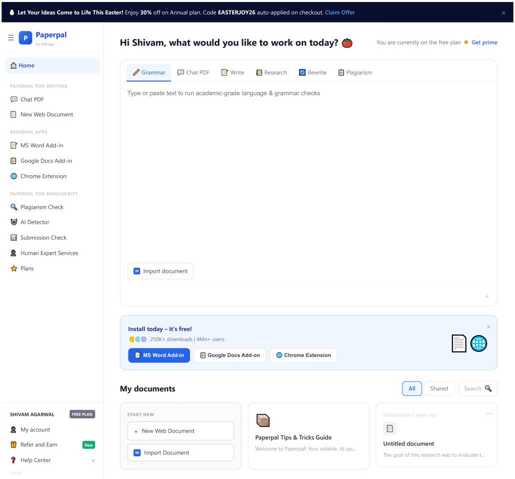
Canceled events 10 — +4 (+66.7%) vs prior 89 days

Completed events trend 1 Jan – 29 Mar

Popular times 1 Jan – 29 Mar
Click on a bar to view details

05. IDEATION & WORKFLOWS

Exploring Feature Possibilities


Paperpal
by Editage
Home
PAPERPAL FOR WRITING
Chat PDF
New Web Document
PAPERPAL APPS
MS Word Add-in
Google Docs Add-in
Chrome Extension
PAPERPAL FOR MANUSCRIPT
Plagiarism Check
AI Detector
Submission Check
Human Expert Services
Plans
SHIVAM AGARWAL
FREE PLAN
My account
Refer and Earn
New
Help Center
Grammar
Chat PDF
Write
Research
Rewrite
Plagiarism
Import document
MS Word Add-in
Google Docs Add-in
Chrome Extension
All
Shared
Search
START NEW
New Web Document
Import Document

Let Your Ideas Come to Life This Easter! Enjoy **30%** off on Annual plan. Code **EASTERJOY26** auto-applied on checkout. Claim Offer

Hi Shivam, what would you like to work on today?

You are currently on the free plan • Get prime

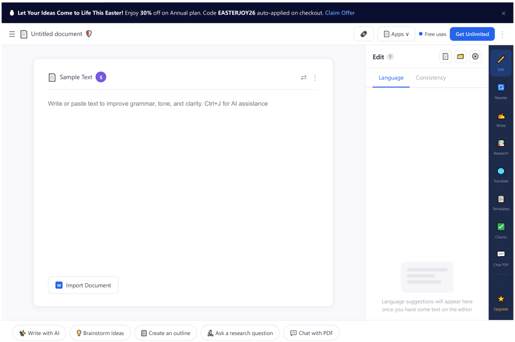
Type or paste text to run academic-grade language & grammar checks

Install today – it's free!
250K+ downloads | 4Mn+ users

My documents

Paperpal Tips & Tricks Guide
Welcome to Paperpal! Your reliable, AI-po...

Edited about 2 years ago
Untitled document
The goal of this research was to evaluate t...


Untitled document
Apps
Free uses
Get Unlimited
Sample Text
S
Import Document
Edit
Language
Consistency
Edit
Rewrite
Write
Research
Translate
Templates
Checks
Chat PDF
Upgrade
Write with AI
Brainstorm Ideas
Create an outline
Ask a research question
Chat with PDF

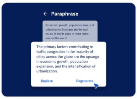
Let Your Ideas Come to Life This Easter! Enjoy **30%** off on Annual plan. Code **EASTERJOY26** auto-applied on checkout. Claim Offer

Write or paste text to improve grammar, tone, and clarity. Ctrl+J for AI assistance

Language suggestions will appear here once you have some text on the editor

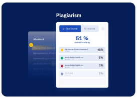
AI Writing Tool

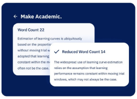
Requirement analysis and competitor analysis followed by ideation and internal stakeholder approvals.


Paraphrase
Replace
Regenerate

Economic growth, population rise, and urbanisation increase are the root cause of traffic jams in most cities around the world

The primary factors contributing to traffic congestion in the majority of cities across the globe are the upsurge in economic growth, population expansion, and the intensification of urbanization.


Plagiarism
Top Source
All sources
51 %
Overall Similarity
Abstract
45%
www.researchgate.net
5%
www.researchgate.net
3%
1%

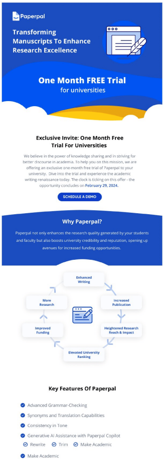

Make Academic.

Word Count 22

Estimation of learning curves is ubiquitously based on the proportio without moving trial w adopted that learning constant within the m often not be the case.

Reduced Word Count 14

The widespread use of learning curve estimation relies on the assumption that learning performance remains constant within moving trial windows, which may not always be the case.



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Exclusive Invite: One Month Free Trial For Universities

We believe in the power of knowledge sharing and in striving for better discourse in academia. To help you on this mission, we are offering an exclusive one-month free trial of Paperpal to your university. Dive into the trial and experience the academic writing renaissance today. The clock is ticking on this offer - the opportunity concludes on **February 29, 2024.**

SCHEDULE A DEMO

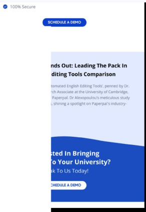
Why Paperpal?

Paperpal not only enhances the research quality generated by your students and faculty but also boosts university credibility and reputation, opening up avenues for increased funding opportunities.

Enhanced Writing
Increased Publication
Heightened Research Reach & Impact
Elevated University Ranking
Improved Funding
More Research

Key Features Of Paperpal

- Advanced Grammar-Checking
- Synonyms and Translation Capabilities
- Consistency in Tone
- Generative AI Assistance with Paperpal Copilot
  - Rewrite
  - Trim
  - Make Academic
- Make Academic



- 100% Secure

SCHEDULE A DEMO

nds Out: Leading The Pack In diting Tools Comparison

tomated English Editing Tools', penned by Dr. rch Associate at the University of Cambridge, Paperpal. Dr Alexopoulou's meticulous study , shining a spotlight on Paperpal's industry-

sted In Bringing o Your University?
ak To Us Today!

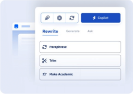
CHEDULE A DEMO

What makes Paperpal the best online paraphraser for academics

Tailored to enhance academic writing, our precise online paraphrasing tool helps you deliver clear, concise, and impactful writing with one click.

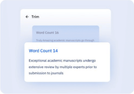
Quickly rewrite academic text

Paraphrase text to remove redundancies to deliver clear, impactful writing, every time, ensuring academic tone.


Copilot
Rewrite
Generate
Ask
Paraphrase
Trim
Make Academic

Trim text without sacrificing meaning

Reduce word count by up to 25%, eliminating redundancies and wordiness to deliver clear, concise writing that meets journal word count limits.

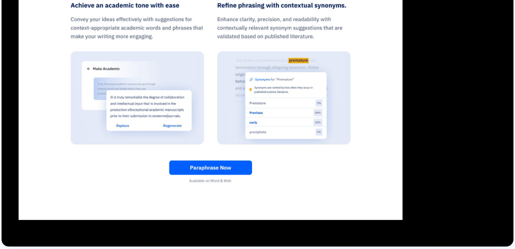


Word Count 16

Truly Amazing academic manuscripts go through

Word Count 14

Exceptional academic manuscripts undergo extensive review by multiple experts prior to submission to journals



Achieve an academic tone with ease

Convey your ideas effectively with suggestions for context-appropriate academic words and phrases that make your writing more engaging.

Refine phrasing with contextual synonyms.

Enhance clarity, precision, and readability with contextually relevant synonym suggestions that are validated based on published literature.

Make Academic
It is truly remarkable the degree of collaboration and intellectual input that is involved in the production ofexceptional academic manuscripts prior to their submission to esteemedjournals.
Replace
Regenerate
premature
termination through offspring desertion. Whilst
Synonyms for "Premature"
Synonyms are ranked by how often they occur in published science literature.
Premature 1%
Previous 58%
early 35%
precipitate 1%

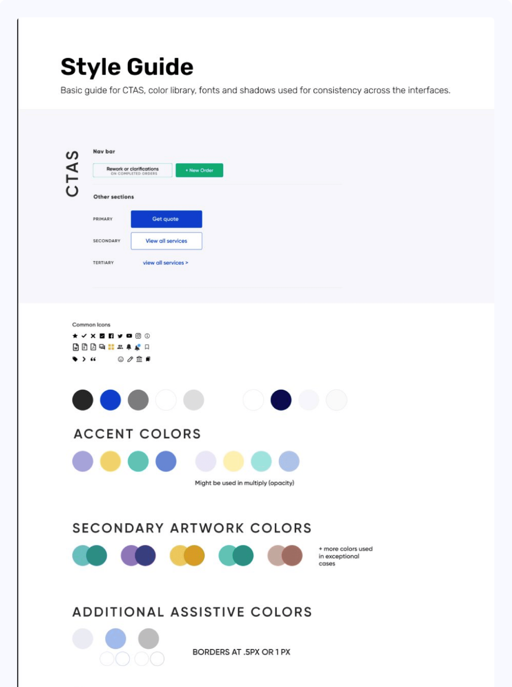
Paraphrase Now

Available on Word & Web

06. DESIGN SYSTEM

Creating Consistency Across Interfaces

We built a style guide to ensure every interaction felt intentional, academic, and trustworthy. Consistency builds confidence.



Style Guide

Basic guide for CTAS, color library, fonts and shadows used for consistency across the interfaces.

CTAS

Nav bar

Rework or clarifications
ON COMPLETED ORDERS
+ New Order

Other sections

PRIMARY
Get quote

SECONDARY
View all services

TERTIARY
view all services >

Common Icons

ACCENT COLORS

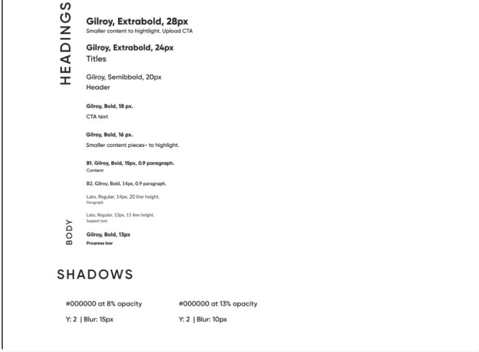
Might be used in multiply (opacity)

SECONDARY ARTWORK COLORS

+ more colors used in exceptional cases

ADDITIONAL ASSISTIVE COLORS

BORDERS AT .5PX OR 1 PX



HEADINGS

Gilroy, Extrabold, 28px
Smaller content to hightlight. Upload CTA

Gilroy, Extrabold, 24px
Titles

Gilroy, Semibbold, 20px
Header

Gilroy, Bold, 18 px.
CTA text

Gilroy, Bold, 16 px.
Smaller content pieces- to highlight.

B1. Gilroy, Bold, 15px, 0.9 paragraph.
Content

B2. Gilroy, Bold, 14px, 0.9 paragraph.

Lato, Regular, 14px, 20 line height.
Paragraph

Lato, Regular, 13px, 15 line height.
Support text

BODY

Gilroy, Bold, 13px
Progress bar

SHADOWS

#000000 at 8% opacity	#000000 at 13% opacity
Y: 2 | Blur: 15px	Y: 2 | Blur: 10px

Component Library

Colors

Primary blue (#0052CC) for actions and trust. Accent colors for status and feedback. Secondary artwork colors for visual hierarchy.

Typography

Gilroy for headings (professional, clear). System fonts for body (accessible, readable). Consistent sizing across responsive breakpoints.

CTAs

Primary (bold blue), Secondary (outline), Tertiary (text). Each state communicates priority and action type.

Shadows & Spacing

Subtle elevation for modals. Consistent whitespace for breathing room. Grid-based spacing for alignment.

07. TESTING & VALIDATION

Measuring What We Built

We iterated the design based on usability feedback, fixing the very discoverability problems we'd uncovered in research.

✓ Copilot Button Discoverability

After redesigning the button placement and visual hierarchy, we saw a significant jump in feature recognition and usage.

80%+ visibility in second round

⚠ Word Add-in Integration

Identified conflicts between Paperpal and other Word extensions. Coordinated with the engineering team to resolve sync issues.

Fixed in v2 release

Key Learnings

Trust + Discoverability = Adoption. The best feature in the world doesn't matter if users can't find it or don't trust it.

Academic workflows are non-negotiable. Researchers will abandon a tool if it doesn't fit into their existing process.

Mixed methods research works. Surveys give you breadth; interviews give you depth. Together, they reveal truth.

08. REFLECTIONS

What This Project Taught Me

1. Specialization Beats Generic

A tool designed for academic researchers will always outperform a generic tool adapted for academics. Context matters more than breadth.

2. Discoverability Is Feature Design

You can build the perfect feature, but if users don't know it exists or how to use it, adoption flatlines. Visibility is part of the product.

3. Mixed Methods Reveal Truth

Surveys tell you what people do. Interviews tell you why. Together, they tell you the truth. Neither alone is enough.

4. Trust Is Earned Through Transparency

Researchers are skeptical of AI for good reason. Showing them how the tool works, not just what it does, builds confidence.

5. Workflow Integration Matters

Features that don't fit into existing workflows are friction, not solutions. Design for the systems people already use.

6. Test Your Assumptions Early

We assumed researchers would find the Copilot button. Testing proved us wrong. Early validation saves iterations and shipping delays.

09. CREDITS

Who Made This Happen

MENTOR

Rahul Vedula

Design Director

LEAD DESIGNER

Nikhil More

Senior UI Designer

RESEARCHER

Janvhi Vaidya

UXR Intern

RESEARCH TEAM

Rohini, Anrinita, Shrusti

UXR Support

This project was conducted at Cactus Communications during 2023–2024. Some design instances have been simplified for public sharing. The full case study showcases the complete design process from research through validation to production launch.